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ABSTRACT

The Mishawaka special reading program, now in its sixth year of operation, is supported primarily with Elementary Secondary Education Act Title I funds. The program is designed to enable reading handicapped children to achieve and maintain a reading skill higher than a year below their grade placement; interpret the child's strengths and weaknesses in reading skills to the parent and classroom teacher so that many of the pressures operating on the child can be removed; improve the child's concept of self; interpret the child's reading strengths and weaknesses so that he may understand the various skills in which he needs improvements. Among the features of the program are daily or thrice weekly instruction; a continuous program of diagnosis and instruction with no time limit on participation; an exceptionally large and varied group of materials and strategies in the special reading program an on-going inservice program and instructional support for teachers; and a system-wide commitment to improving reading skills. The Mishawaka special reading program has resulted in highly significant gains in reading level (as measured by the Gates-MacGinitie Test for grade two and the Stanford Diagnosis Test, for grades three through six). (Author/JM)

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SPECIAL READING PROJECT

(Mishawaka, Indiana)

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
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EDUCATION

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Preface

In efforts at improving the quality of education and at justifying expenditures for compensatory education and school desegregation, we are increasingly dependent upon the data of evaluative research. Yet the data from many of these evaluation efforts conducted over the past twelve years are confused and inconclusive. The findings from these studies are sometimes contradictory. The interpretations have become the subject of considerable controversy, particularly as these findings and interpretations appear to contradict some of our cherished assumptions concerning education and educability. The lack of clarity with respect to the meaning of these data and the value of such programs is in part attributable to a variety of problems in the design and conduct of evaluative research. Among these problems, increasing attention is being called to the fact that there are sparse data concerning the specific nature of program interventions. These tend to be reported under labels or brief descriptions which provide little information relative to the nature and quality of the treatments to which the pupils studied are exposed. In an effort at gaining a better understanding of the content and nature of some of these programs, this project was directed at describing selected programs thought to be exemplary of quality, progress, trends or problems in compensatory education and school desegregation. Ten compensatory education programs and two school desegregation programs were selected for detailed description.

The principal procedures utilized in this study included documentary

analysis, direct observation of programs and interviews with selected informants. The tasks to be accomplished included identification and selection of projects to be studied, collection of all available data on each project considered, field study of promising candidate projects, preparation of descriptive reports, final selection and reporting.

Following is the description of one of these selected programs. For the complete report of this project see document number ED 099 458 in the ERIC system.

In Mishawaka, Indiana, theory and practice are joined in an extremely effective special reading program.

Designed to:

enable reading handicapped children to achieve and maintain a reading skill higher than a year below their grade placement

interpret the child's strenths and weaknesses in reading skills to the parent and classroom teacher so that many of the pressures operating on the child can be removed

improve the child's concept of self

interpret the child's reading strenths and weaknesses so that he may understand the various skills in which he needs improvements

Through:

daily or thrice-weekly instruction

a continuous program of diagnosis and instruction with no time limit on participation

an exceptionally large and varied group of materials and strategies in the special reading program

an on-going, inservice program and instructional support for teachers

a system-wide commitment to improving reading skills

The Mishawaka Special Reading Program has resulted in:

Highly significant gains in reading level (as measured by the Gates-MacGinitie Test for grade 2 and the Stanford Diagnostic Test, for grades 3-6)

SUMMARY

Now in its sixth year of operation, the Mishawaka special reading program attempts to improve the reading ability of elementary school pupils who are below grade level; heighten parents' and teaching staff's awareness of a child's reading problems; and to improve the child's self-concept. To achieve these goals, the special reading program utilizes daily instruction; an imaginative, varied special reading curriculum, and a continuing in-service program for reading teachers.

The project is supported primarily with ESEA-Title I funds. Mishawaka's special reading program is exemplary because of the daily, continuous instruction for reading-handicapped children; of the thorough in-service teacher training which, in turn, engenders teacher enthusiasm and commitment; and of the impressive gains in reading ability that pupils in the program have made. With minor adaptations, the program could be replicated in other communities.

WHERE

Approximately 35,000 people live in Mishawaka, in the northern part of Indiana. The population, predominantly white, includes many southerners who came to work in the factories as well as many residents of Belgian and Italian descent. The factories which break and color the sky are the source of employment for most of Mishiwaka's residents.

The children who participate in the special reading project attend the five Title I elementary schools and three parochial schools

that are located near downtown Mishawaka. In addition, the project provides a 2/3 time teacher at the Family & Children's Center, a state-supported home for dependent children. As in many other industrial cities, the majority of the low income population live in or near the downtown area. The city's one low-income housing project (with approximately 650 people) is located here. Overcrowded housing -- despite the predominance of single-family dwellings -- and the city's highest mobility rate also characterize the downtown section.

WHEN

These five Title I elementary schools, five other elementary schools junior high schools, and one high school are administered by the School City of Mishawaka, the local educational agency. The public school system enrolls 7335 pupils. There are three parochial elementary schools (K-8) and one parochial high school.

In 1966-67, a new public school committee (principals, laymen, and religious members and staff) developed jointly the Title I proposal which resulted in the funding of the special reading program. Although parents were informed of the project, no parent representatives were on the committee.

In 1972, six years later, the program continued to thrive; more children, more reading teachers and more materials signaled both its acceptance and the system's determination to continue it.

WHY

Reading is the most basic skill. A man or woman who cannot read

is disadvantaged forever. As Thomas Jefferson and others observed, the society suffers as well.

Increasingly educators and the public recognize that reading problems must be attacked early in the educational process if children are truly to have the right to read. The Mishawaka school system developed the special reading program in response to a need considered urgent by both parents and teachers. The parents wanted tutoring in reading for their children, and the classroom teacher realized that they could not give the slow reader the assistance -- in time and kind -- that he required.

WHO The Students

Approximately 600 children, 75 of them in parochial schools, participate in the special reading program. Although many of the children are form low income families, they are often raised in an achievement-oriented environment, one in which diligent study and learning are encouraged. Six reading specialists (one coordinator and five teachers) conduct the reading program. Each Title I elementary school reading program has its own reading specialist.

Although the classroom teacher is usually the person who refers a pupil to the special reading program, a testing program, guidance counselors, principals, parents, and the child himself have also acted as referral agents. This readiness to turn to the program indicates the high regard and lack of onus attached to the Mishawaka program or participation in it. Upon referral, the child

takes a diagnostic test. Children in grade 1 are screened second semester by the Bucks County Placement Test; in grade 2, the Gates-MacGinitie Test; and in grades 3-6, the Stanford Diagnostic Test. The special reading teacher discusses the results with the classroom teacher and decisions on the child's reading program are made jointly. If a child reads more than a year behind his grade level, he is usually placed in a special reading group. The principal approves the final placement of the children; however, the following criteria are used in determining the order of placement:

1. Students with I.Q.'s 90 or above who read at a level a year or more behind grade placement.
2. Students with I. Q.'s in the 80's who lag a year or more behind in reading.
3. Students with I.Q.'s in the 60 and 70 range can be added to the program if they are below their own capcaity level or if the teacher thinks they can improve.

WHAT

In the ESEA-Title I proposal, the objectives of the Mishawaka Special Reading Program are defined as follows:

1. To interpret the child's strengths and weaknesses in reading skills to the parent and classroom teacher in such a way so that many of the pressures operating on the child can be removed. They are told about the child's strengths, and they therefore become more positive about his weaknesses.
2. To interpret the child's reading strengths and weaknesses so that he may understand the various skills in which he needs

improvement.

3. To improve the child's concept of self through a carefully planned classroom atmosphere and a system of recording daily progress in small units on graphs or charts kept by the child himself. In some instances, the child is permitted to demonstrate unusual materials or equipment to his parents and classmates.

4. To help reading-handicapped children achieve and maintain reading skill higher than the year below their grade placement.

Objective #4, the only one stated in strict behavioral terms, is the objective that has been actually evaluated. However, the enthusiasm for the program that the children evidence, the cooperation of the classroom teachers who must revise their schedules to deal with the program, and the support of the community are indicative that the other, more intangible objectives are also being achieved.

HOW

Several factors explain the effectiveness of Mishawaka's special reading program: accurate placement of the children who need attention in the reading group; daily special reading classes and the opportunity to attend the reading program for as long as is necessary; the extensive varied imaginative materials that fill the special reading rooms; and finally, the cooperation that pervades the program and affects all its participants from reading teachers to pupils.

Each reading group has from six to ten pupils. Reading level and reading problem determine the composition of the group; for example, third grade reading level, consonant problem. The Mishawaka schools have an ungraded program for grades K-3 and the classrooms are based on nine reading levels. Thus in both homeroom and special reading a child may be grouped with children a year or two older or younger. The special reading classes for children in grades 4-6 are also likely to include two or more age groups.

The special reading program also provides for individual sessions for students who need them. The reading teacher works individually two or three times a week with these students, whom the program labels "clinical". Most of these students have severe reading problems as well as emotional problems that make it difficult for them to achieve in a group situation.

The average length of time that a child remains in the program is difficult to estimate because each child and problem require different periods. The particular effectiveness of the Mishawaka program is that a child can stay for as long as necessary. Many children stay for a semester or a year and then are able to read at their grade level. Approximately one-third of the children have problems severe enough to require their attending the special classes for four or five years. In many cases the continued daily work has enabled a child to do junior high school work when he reaches that level. A child stops attending the special reading classes when tests

illustrate that his reading level is on a par with the rest of the class and when the teacher believes that he will be able to read confidently with his peers.

SCHEDULE

Most students in the program have a daily thirty minute special reading period. Students in grades 4-6 meet three times a week. This session is held in a special reading room, and each school has a room. Scheduling of the special reading class is extremely difficult, particularly since no child is supposed to miss his basic classroom academic lessons, and the children in each reading group come from several different class rooms. The school faculties involved have worked out a solution. The teachers of the first through third grade adapt their lessons around the special reading schedule. In grades four through six, the teachers have staggered the classes so that not more than one regular class is missed each week.

Work from the regular classroom is often taken home by special reading students, and other children frequently help. Occasionally it is impossible to arrange a schedule in which a child does not miss reading or math once or twice a week but these occasions have lasted generally no longer than one semester.

HOW (cont'd) The Special Reading Room

The special reading rooms abound with materials of every kind and concept. The tables and desks are all movable and subjected to

constant rearrangement. All the children have folders which they can locate easily. In general, the folders contain stapled pads labeled according to the book or subject (Barnell-Loft or Phonics) used for the work in these areas. Corrections are made in the pad with the child as he works.

CURRICULUM

When a child embarks on the special reading program, the teacher makes an effort to utilize materials that differ from the ones the child uses in the regular classroom. For the child, this innovation heightens the feeling of a fresh beginning and provides a sense of new adventure. Thus, while many standard materials are available, none of these duplicates those available in the classroom, and multimedia materials, unique to the program, are also present.

Mishawaka teachers had found a lack of word attack skills to be the basic problem underlying many of the reading problems. In the Mishawaka program, emphasis at all grade levels is on the building of work attack skills as well as comprehension skills. The staff has developed a phonetic program to develop word power as rapidly as possible. The material contains an outline of the basic steps which help a child in a phonetic approach to unknown words: the sounds of the vowels and the consonants, the blends and the triple blends, digraphs, suffixes, prefixes, phonograms, and syllabication. When a child has completed these steps, he is able to pronounce correctly

the list of long, difficult words that the material provides. Most children are delighted that they can read all the words correctly.

Second and third year students in the reading program use the Sullivan Reading Program and other selected reading materials, although teachers supplement this material with original efforts to maintain interest. Students in the fourth through sixth grades use such materials as EDL, the Barnell-Loft Skill Development Program, Lyons & Cunningham Phonics We Use and the Readers Digest materials. Because the teachers are very familiar with a wide variety of reading materials, they are able to choose materials according to student need and to personal preference. Since the program maintains an extensive library of instructional materials, teachers are able to avoid the use of a single material more than twice per week.

An extensive list of materials has been devised for easy teacher reference. Phonics and Comprehension, the two main categories, are divided into reading levels, and the phonics section is further subdivided. Much of the reading material has been analyzed and categorized according to specific phonic skills.

Film strips, overhead projectors, EDL and tape recorders are also used. Teachers devise games and other techniques to maintain interest. 'How many syllable does hippopotamus have?" is a question in one game. Two teams of children line up at the black board. The first in each line has to answer the teacher's questions.

Points are awarded for correct answers, and no consideration is given to who answered first. The children enjoy this type of learning activity.

The "clinical" students, those who require individualized attention, use the same materials. The Gillingham Approach of seeing, hearing, and writing every word, has often been found to be effective in these situations (which provides increased flexibility). One fifth grade boy, who had made almost no progress in his two years in the group program, is now beginning to advance. His reading teacher uses a large box of 9 x 3 cards, each with a word on it. The "can read, write and spell" box of cards is growing steadily, much to his delight. Whenever possible, the special reading teacher works with the classroom teacher to provide classroom experiences which integrate content and practice.

HOW (cont'd) The Learning Environment

Not only does the program seek to improve the child's reading ability, it also seeks to improve his self concept. The reading teachers work in different ways to build in each child a sense of accomplishment and a lack of failure. The use of different materials and the small groups all contribute to this. For example, although the teacher rarely "gives the child a word for free" (when he comes to a word he doesn't know), he or she tries to work with him so that he feels that he has definitely participated in supplying part of the word, syllable, vowel, blend or "sounds like". The success of these efforts varies little from teacher to teacher, since the continuation of teachers in the program depends in part on student

progress.

For the most part, the project has successfully avoided the stigma that children and adults so often attach to a special reading project -- "only the slow or dumb kids have to go." The students are told that they are in the program because they can learn. Students explained to the researchers that they were in the program, "because I'm slow in reading," or because "I'm not doing as well as I could".

The sessions are always referred to as "Special Reading," and nearly all the children look forward to these classes. Occasionally children have brought friends along and asked if they could join. Since the children within the groups are together for at least a semester, they establish rapport, understanding and help each other. The children like their individual folders and the multimedia materials. Students who have been in the project for three or four years are as enthusiastic and satisfied with the project as pupils who are new to special reading.

The program enjoys significant cooperation at all levels of the school system and has inspired other efforts as well. Despite the rigors of scheduling, almost all of the classroom teachers support the program. The special reading teachers keep the classroom teachers informed of the progress of special class students and consult with them. They also assist classroom teachers who request it. Guidance counselors work closely with the special reading teachers concerning the clinical pupils, those with emotional as well as reading problems. As a result of the program, several of

the physical education teachers have initiated percetpual training for those children who need it. The school administration also instituted a pre-kindergarten program because they felt that early discovery of potential reading problems would eliminate some of the difficulties in learning to read. A testing program is being developed to identify those high-risk children at the beginning of their school careers.

WHO

Committed, enthusiastic, experienced teachers and an ongoing inservice program have been critical to the success of the program.

PERSONNEL

A reading coordinator and five special reading teachers staff the program. Four of the teachers are involved on a full-time basis, and one, half-time. All of the teachers had taught before entering the project. They were selected because they were considered "successful classroom teachers who easily establish good rapport with children, who demonstrate creativity in their work, and who possess a dynamic and enthusiastic approach." The program demands that the teacher work intensively with a child on a daily basis. For this reason, the program planners placed primary importance on the ability to establish rapport rather than on prior special training in reading instruction.

The reading coordinator visits the schools to observe, to assist with teaching, to offer suggestions to the teachers, and to work with

principals and administrators. She schedules one two-hour session for all the teachers monthly. At these meetings, the teachers discuss their experiences with materials and problems that they may have had with a particular group or child, consider new materials, and analyze the ongoing diagnostic data. According to the participants, the strong, sympathetic leadership of the original coordinator was invaluable.

At present, new teachers take a two-week half-day training program which includes emphasis on comprehension, phonics, diagnostic procedures, prescription and materials. For the first three years of the project, the teachers taught their special reading classes only four days a week. One day each week was devoted to materials study and development. During these sessions, they developed the "Outline for the Teaching of Phonics" and special skill sheets, related both to published materials and to individual programs. Two of the teachers who participated in this curriculum development are still in the project.

Enthusiastic and committed to the program, the teachers have all taken special reading courses since the inception of the project, and several have attended and participated in reading conferences and workshops. They are appreciative of the opportunity to become expert in this field and of the ongoing guidance. The classroom teachers recognize their expertise and, perhaps for this reason, cooperate readily when children must be excused for their classes for special reading.

WHO (cont'd) Parents

From the beginning, parents have been a part of the Mishawaka project, though not always directly. Their request for tutoring assistance was an impetus for Mishawaka's request for Title I funding for the special reading program. As discussed earlier, the parents inculcate in their children the values of serious study and learning. Further, one of the primary objectives of the project was to increase the parents' awareness of a child's reading problem.

All of the schools have P.T.A.'s and there is a Title I Advisory Council. Although the schools sponsor two parent conferences a year and encourage the parents to visit at any time, the parents themselves vary widely in their participation and knowledge of the school's activities and their child's role in it. When a child begins a special reading program, the school notifies his parents by letter; the school describes the program and invites the parents to contact the principal or reading teacher if they have any question. Many of the parents attend regular parent conferences twice a year; these parents tend to be familiar with, and enthusiastic about, the program. Active parental involvement, however, appears to be minimal.

To stregthen this aspect of the program, greater emphasis is being given to parent conferences, held twice each year. Parents are encouraged to participate in parent visitations. They have been involved in the development of and report on instructional materials, are encouraged to participate in the book fair sponsored annually by

the school district. The newspapers have been extensively utilized to keep parents and community informed. Despite these efforts, the quality of specific parent involvement is heavily dependent on the activity of the specific teacher.

HOW (con'd) Cost

In 1971-72, the total cost of the Mishawaka Special Reading Program was $56,175. Of this, 94% was ESEA Title I funds, 4% local and 2% state. The School City of Mishawaka, the local education agency, estimates the cost of the program at $100 per program participant. Mishawaka spent in 1971-72 $810 per pupil in its schools.

Mishawaka is committed to this program and to continuing it. While the local system could not sustain the project at the current level without the federal funds, the researchers believe that the special reading program would be continued in as strong a manner as possible.

WHAT Evaluation

The Mishawaka program has resulted in very impressive reading level gains for the participants. Pupils in the special reading program take the Gates-MacGinitie test (in grade 2) and the Stanford Diagnostic Test (in grades 3-6) in the fall and spring of each year. In the years 1970-71 and 1971-72, the gains in percentile rank in relation to national norms on both of these tests were greater than

in any previous year of the project. Of the 606 children tested in 1971-72, 142 gained from 10-14 months; 68 gained more than 15 months; and 44 gained more than 20 months (normal gain = 9 months). None of the 53 grade-level groups (30 in public school, 23 in parochial school) failed to achieve the expected gain of five months.

In addition to this general evaluation, the school system completed a longitudinal study in 1971. All the students in seventh and eighth grade who had taken at least one semester of special reading at the elementary shcool level were included. While the results indicated that the percentage of regressions in each of the elementary grades was very small, the number rose at the middle school level with the largest percentage of regressions occurring in the seventh grade. This pattern appeared to reverse in the eighth grade, with a progressive pattern again established. The staff feel that the class organization at the junior high school and the omission of formal reading instruction at this level contribues substantially to these regressions. This trend may decrease when the three new junior high schools currently under construction are completed. A complete reading laboratory and an new junior high school reading curriculum with both developmental and special courses are planned for each of the new schools.

In the Annual Evaluation Report, Title I of ESEA (1970) published by the Indiana State Department of Public Instruction, the Mishawaka program was one of five programs considered "outstanding"

and to "involve activities in which many school systems have expressed an interest".

WHAT (cont'd) Effectiveness

Although special reading programs dot the United States educational landscape like so many hamburger stands, successful ones, like a good hamburger, are very hard to find. Frequently these programs neither provide daily instruction nor continue for the period necessary to solve the child's problem. A one semester program that meets weekly or bi-weekly denies the reading-handicapped child a sustained crack at improvement. For such children, to move a step up and then have the ladder wrenched away is probably far worse than to never gain a toehold at all. Not only are special reading programs frequently ineffective; often they also make the participant a pariah and consequently encounter stiff parent-pupil resistance. In Mishawaka, a child attends reading classes daily for as long as necessary. Because of the attitude and atmosphere within the schools, special reading does not inspire the mortification or humiliation that mark the subject and activity elsewhere.

Increasingly we hear that despite the specific nature of the curriculum, staff commitment and systematic teaching contribute greatly to the success of many educational experiments. In Mishawaka where the program is system-wide and the staff is strongly committed to teaching children to read "by any means necessary," we see encouraging results. This project proceeds from the assumption that fairly traditional approaches to the diagnosis of reading difficulties can

reveal learning problems. The project contends that these problems, if discovered in the early grades, will be responsive to an eclectic approach to reading instruction. Word attack skills are singled out for special emphasis in diagnosis and treatment. Varied, high interest materials, constant personal support, confidence building and individual attention are the principal components of the Mishawaka special reading program. An ongoing inservice training for all teachers and other administrative arrangements further strengthen the commitment to improve children's reading skills. Although, on close examination, problems are identifiable, such scrutiny also reveals high enthusiasm, active teacher and pupil involvement, and achievement results which are unusual for schools serving disadvantaged populations.

Having determined a high incidence of poor word attack skills in poor readers, the program utilizes a wide variety of strategies and techniques to teach these skills. The project staff has correctly sensed the need for continuing diagnostic and individualized work. The diagnostic tests used permit the identification of several aspects of pupil function, such as visual perception, blending, syllabication, sound discrimination, vocabulary and comprehension. After sensitizing teachers to the presence or absence of such problems, this information is translated into instructional strategies. These and other strategies in the program reveal that clear notions of the developmental tasks essential to reading mastery give direction both to the diagnostic and treatment impetus of this program.

Although the project enjoys a high degree of confidence and support from the parents, an active program of parental input and

involvement would be a healthy addition. There seems to be a high level of readiness on the part of parents to go along with whatever the school does. In these days of pressure for community control, this readiness suggests that the project schools have won the confidence and respect of the parents whose children they serve.

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